Local Stories Fast:

10 Steps to Helping Communities Create Early Reading Materials With Bloom

IREX · ALL CHILDREN READING: A GRAND CHALLENGE FOR DEVELOPMENT · BEYOND ACCESS — Making Information Work For Everyone

What is this?

IREX created this guide to help you plan and host a community-based Bloom Camp to collect, write, and publish local stories and early reading materials using the Bloom software package. Bloom was developed by SIL International for a prize competition of All Children Reading: A Grand Challenge for Development (a partnership of USAID, World Vision and the Australian Government).

Who is this for?

Based on IREX's experience running Bloom Camps in the Philippines in Summer 2016, this guide is for any organization that wants to generate locally-relevant reading materials for early learners. It is intended to help generate a quantity and diversity of materials in an extremely short timeframe. With 20 participants, a two-day Bloom Camp can easily generate between 10 and 20 basic books in any language.

Preparing for the Camp

1. Bring schools, libraries, and education NGOs on board from the beginning.
Think broadly about the community stakeholders. In addition to schools and government education agencies, consider including libraries, daycares, and preschools. All of these groups have a clear interest in improving early literacy, and Bloom Camps can help bring them together.

2. Making Bloom work is not primarily about deploying technology.
Making Bloom work is only secondarily about deploying technology. If you want communities to find the tool useful, invest about 80% of your energy, planning, and resources into preparing for and gathering content. The remaining 20% should go into thinking about the technology itself, including ensuring software installation and printer setup have been done ahead of time.

3. Provide workshop facilitators sufficient learning opportunities with Bloom beforehand.
IREX found that preparation requires at least a half-day staff training session coupled with individual practice. This provides enough expertise in the software tool to effectively guide new learners.

During the Camp

4. Be hands-on and aim for immediate results.
Dedicate the first half of the camp to learning by doing. Create a simple book (like a picture dictionary) together as a group, and then have participants create individual books. Have a printer on hand, so people can immediately see the outputs of their work.

What you'll need

- Computers with Bloom and Art of Reading pre-installed, at least 1 per 2 people
- Printer and sufficient supply of A4 paper
- Colored pencils, paper and a scanner for illustrations
- Flipchart paper and markers

5. Start with readily available or easy to create content.
At the initial stage, simplify story creation so you can focus on teaching the tool and planning for ways for participants to use the tool beyond the camp. During the camp use already created stories that can be translated or integrate story gathering activities into the camp (see #6 and #7).

6. Separate the story creation process from the software component.
When you start writing stories, step away from the computer. Discuss as a group common story types (e.g. how things work, folklore, values) and the characteristics of a good story for children. Let participants create stories away from the computer. Once a draft of each story is created, work on adapting it within Bloom.

7. Provide a set of "story prompts" to get participants on track.
Develop four or five clear writing prompts for different story types. Distribute these prompts to participants and ask them to create stories that respond to the prompts. This will help jumpstart brainstorming and ensure the first group of stories created cover a wide range of topics.

8. Finding appropriate illustrations is a challenge.
It is time consuming to take a new story, identify culturally appropriate illustrations, and align page breaks usefully. Expect that this process will take considerable time and share tips and guidelines for selecting illustrations. You can use the stock illustrations availble in Bloom, but it is even better if you invite local artists to participate and create illustrations for each book.

After the Camp

9. Nudge participants to think creatively about how they can deploy new books in their communities beyond the Bloom Camp.
Guide participants in thinking through how they will use the materials they produce. Provide easy-to-plan activities so that participants can quickly get the most out of the new books in their community. Activities may include group read-aloud events, paired and shared reading along with parents, and follow-on art projects that help children process information and increase comprehension. Also consider: Where will books be available after the event? At the library? Will schools offer them in the classroom? Will children be able to take them home? How will you encourage parents to read with children using these books?

10. Provide useful tools for measuring results.
Depending on the scope and resources associated with a given literacy initiative, it's important to identify simple, useful, and appropriate ways to measure the results of local language book production for communities. Suggested useful and achievable indicators include:

- Number of materials produced
- Number of children exposed to these materials
- Number of parents or caregivers exposed to these materials
- Number of titles in a specific language publicly available
- Number of places local language materials are available in a given community